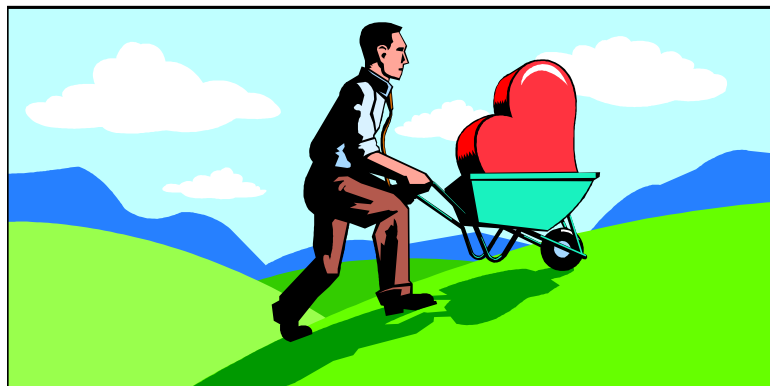

Unit 5: Behavior management strategies for children with special needs

Overview

Unit 5 is a one hour classroom session devoted to behavior management issues for drivers of children with special needs.

The unit focuses on what works with all children, but also prepares drivers for handling especially challenging children, potential violence, etc.



Unit 5 Framework

Core Content Outline 5.1. Unit 5 introduction 5.2. What works with today's children? 5.3. Avoiding the conflict spiral 5.4. Violence, fights, and weapons 5.5. The importance of documentation 5.6. Unit 5 review	Objectives By the conclusion of this unit, drivers will be able to: 1. Explain why discipline for children with special needs is determined on an individual basis. 2. Describe five key elements for successful behavior management. 3. Explain at least three ways drivers can help break a conflict spiral with a child who is emotionally disturbed. 4. Explain how to defuse a potential fight and what to do if a fight breaks out on the bus. 5. Use referrals properly.
Suggested Time 60 minutes	Preparation 1. Review Best Practice Backgrounders 2. Overhead projector, screen, and transparencies in place

UNIT 5.1
CORE CONTENT
Unit 5 introduction

BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

Children are children. Years ago, “handicapped” children were subjects of pity, seen as innocent, almost angelic. But in actuality children with special needs are every bit as diverse as nondisabled children. And while many special children are models of perfect behavior, other children with disabilities, and not just those who are emotionally disturbed, are constant challenges during the bus ride.

For instance, many bus drivers have been startled to discover that even a child with severe physical disabilities can still find ways to cause mischief, such as throwing their shoes at the driver, or pinching the bus aide who is bending over to secure the child’s wheelchair!

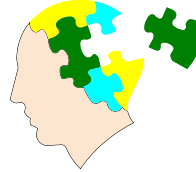
Children are children. In most cases, behavior management techniques for children with disabilities are no different than for the nondisabled population. A driver who is successful with nondisabled children can be just as successful with children who have special needs; and a driver who can’t handle “typical” children probably can’t handle children with disabilities either.

Transporting children who are emotionally disturbed can be challenging – and gratifying.

Children with emotional problems are also diverse. Many are quiet and well behaved and constitute absolutely no problem on their buses. Other children in this population are disruptive, defiant, and even potentially violent. But the same is true of nondisabled children. In fact, the increased school violence around the country in recent years has

not been limited to children with identified emotional disturbance.

But there is no question that transporting children who are emotionally disturbed can be very challenging at times. Teachers and administrators who deal with this population also find it challenging. Confining a number of children with emotional problems in the small space of a school bus for a 45-minute or longer bus ride is inherently difficult. Some bus drivers are afraid to take such a route because of the stories and anecdotes they’ve overheard. However, working with children with emotional disturbance can be fulfilling. The feeling of “touching” a troubled child’s life is gratifying. In fact, some bus drivers love transporting children with emotional problems. And some become so effective at it that teachers and principals come to



them for advice about how to handle a child.

Legal constraints on discipline. Since the inception of IDEA, courts have determined that if a behavior problem is in some way caused by a child’s disability, school districts may be constrained in the type and duration of discipline allowed.

Drivers sometimes become frustrated because “nothing happens” when they report behavior problems. Drivers need to understand that school districts are obligated by law to follow established due process procedures in assessing discipline for children with special needs. Each child with a disability must be assessed individually. Discipline is determined on an individual basis. In some cases, out-of-school suspensions may be limited or not allowed at all; or alternate busing arrangements may be required.

Instructional Strategies

Discussion questions

- ✓ *Are children with disabilities less likely to misbehave than nondisabled children?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 5-1: “Behavior Management Strategies for Children with Special Needs”*

Workbook

- ✎ 5-1

UNIT 5.2
CORE CONTENT

*What works with
today's children?*

**BEST PRACTICE
BACKGROUND**

In today's society, some children, like some adults, seem to have lost respect for others - and for themselves. This is as true for children with disabilities as it is for nondisabled children.

But some adults, including some bus drivers, are wonderful at working with children.

Learning from success.

Successful bus drivers identify five key elements of effective student management:

1. **Consistency.** In today's uncertain world, children hunger for consistency. Children need to know that the same rules apply every day. It means treating children the same every day, including the times the driver is having a bad day.
2. **Firm, but fair, rules.** Children today need clear limits. Effective aides and drivers lay out simple rules from "Day One" and stick with them. They make it clear they're serious about safety, and help children to understand the "whys" behind the rules. They expect safe behavior from all children and don't "play favorites." (Children can be very sensitive to any perception of unfairness.)
3. **The power of the positive.** Successful drivers consistently list "being positive" as one of the most important ways to improve student behavior. There are many simple ways to build positive rapport with children, such as smiling, greeting every child by name, showing an interest in each child, etc. Praising children when they behave -

"catching them being good" - is often very effective.

4. **Modeling respectful behavior.** Bus drivers and aides are role models. A positive attitude, an ability to laugh at oneself, professional appearance, respectful use of language, maturity and self-control are effective with children. For instance, drivers and aides should make it clear that bias and prejudice will not be tolerated on the bus. Young people endure many brutal "put-downs" today, usually starting out as teasing but often resulting in angry incidents. Children ridicule each other for being too poor, too dark, too light, too heavy, too thin, too country, too city, too smart, too stupid, etc. Racial and ethnic slurs abound. This casual inhumanity has a deep effect on children's psyches and on student behavior. Drivers and aides can serve as a model of a better way to treat people.
5. **Using psychology, not**

force. Adults should not, and often cannot, overpower children. Authority derives from understanding and moral influence, not force. Psychology means getting to know each child as an individual personality so behavior problems can be anticipated instead of only reacted to. Psychology means using common sense, such as assigning seats and keeping children separated when a fight is brewing.

Mistakes to avoid. Even difficult children deserve dignity. Adults should never add to a child's problems by belittling a child or screaming in anger. Seatbelts should never be used to restrain a child as a disciplinary measure without school approval. And drivers should never grab, push, or shove a child, no matter how disruptive he or she is. When the situation becomes that serious, drivers should use the radio and call for assistance.

Instructional Strategies

Discussion questions

- ✓ *Which behavior management technique works best for you?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 5-2: "What Works with Today's Children?"*

Workbook

- ✍ 5-2

BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

Working with children who are emotionally disturbed can be very challenging. But it doesn't mean these children are "bad." They have an emotional illness.

Children with serious emotional problems often become trapped in "conflict spirals" with peers and adults. Some children become very adept at finding and pushing adult "buttons." With such children, a negative reaction is like pouring gas on a smoldering fire. Some children have experienced so much conflict in their lives that they are no longer intimidated by adult authority.

Understanding conflict spirals.

Most parents have made the mistake of letting their own children draw them into an endless argument. But with children who are emotionally disturbed, conflicts are easily triggered, continual, and intense.



- Family, school, and peer problems and pressures can build up in all children, but children who are emotionally disturbed lack the psychological resources to channel frustrations into a positive outlet.
- With children who are emotionally disturbed, very minor incidents can quickly escalate into major incidents. Literally "just looking at" an emotionally disturbed child can provoke an explosion if conditions are right.
- The cause of the original stress is often hidden to adults.
- The conflict spiral builds on itself when a child's defensive and provocative

behavior evokes hostile reactions from peers or adults.

Helping to break the conflict spiral.

- Drivers need to understand there is a reason for a child's behavior, although it may be hidden.
- Drivers should be aware of their own emotional reactions to abusive behavior from a child. It's natural to feel upset by disrespectful behavior.
- The goal of self-awareness is self-control. Bus drivers and aides must strive not to take behavior personally.
- An upset child's feelings should be acknowledged and validated. Adults should use "I" messages - "I see you are angry," "I see you're upset."
- A driver's goal should be to manage behavior on the bus so children can get to school.

UNIT 5.3 CORE CONTENT

Avoiding the conflict spiral

It should never be to punish a child or "teach parents a lesson."

- Experienced drivers learn when to selectively ignore or "extinguish" a minor problem. Of course, serious safety problems cannot be ignored.
- An adult should never be the pin that bursts a child's emotional balloon. But a trusted adult who has become a mentor to a troubled child may be able to let the air out of the balloon.

Drivers should never hold grudges against difficult children. Children have enough problems: each day should be a new day.

Instructional Strategies

Discussion questions

- ✓ *How can drivers help to break a conflict spiral?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 5-3: "Avoiding the Conflict Spiral"*

Flipchart

- ✍ *Lead a brainstorming session about how drivers can avoid falling into a conflict spiral. Log ideas on the flipchart.*

Workbook

- ✍ *5-3*

UNIT 5.4
CORE CONTENT

Violence, fights, and weapons

**BEST PRACTICE
BACKGROUND**

Many trends in our society have apparently contributed to the increase in school violence in recent years. Violence is certainly not limited to children with special needs or children who are considered emotionally disturbed. However, some children who are emotionally disturbed do display threatening or violent behavior, and school staff responsible for these children need to be alert to various possibilities.

Don't exaggerate and don't downplay the problem. Student violence is an unpleasant topic, and some drivers become frightened when discussing it. In fact, most children, including most children with emotional problems, are not violent in any way.

On the other hand, the threat of youth violence is real. Nationally, it is estimated that 100,000 students bring a weapon to school every day. Many incidents of guns and other weapons being brought on school buses have been reported.

Awareness. Drivers and aides who know their children well may pick up early warning signs of brewing trouble. A sudden change in a troubled child's behavior - for instance, unusually silent, unusually talkative, or possibly concealing something in clothes or backpack - should be reported to school personnel. Reports from other students of a weapon on board should be taken seriously. Maybe the gun in the book bag is "just a toy" - maybe it's not. Some school districts have adopted a distinctive emergency radio code (e.g., "I have a green light on the dash") to let a driver report a suspected weapon without alerting the

student. Drivers shouldn't confront a child they suspect of carrying a weapon.

Defusing volatile situations.

The ability to defuse a potentially violent situation is an important skill for drivers transporting challenging students. Anticipating and preventing a fight is far better than trying to break one up.

A driver's calm voice and non-threatening body language can de-escalate a potentially violent dispute. Antagonists should be separated. An especially angry student should be given "breathing room" away from all other children if possible. Drivers should be alert to signs that the student is about to attack. An attacker often looks down or away just before striking.



If a fight breaks out. Bus drivers are not police officers. Immediately "wading in" to a fist fight between older students is not a good idea. An injury to the driver will only make the situation worse. Whenever a fight or any form of violence is imminent or has broken out, base

should be called at once. The bus should be stopped in a safe area. Students may suddenly jump off the bus during the fight.

Screaming at students fighting is ineffective. It's better to direct them to stop in a stern, loud, authoritative voice. If other students are "egging the fighters on" they must be stopped at once. As much as possible, other students should be moved away from the fight. In severe situations, other students may need to be evacuated from the bus, but they cannot be left unattended.

Efforts should be focused on encouraging a student who appears to be losing a fight to back away - there's more incentive to stop. From behind, the driver or bus aide may be able to back one student down the aisle away from the other. The combatants should be kept at opposite ends of the bus until help arrives. Students a few rows apart can suddenly jump over seats and renew the attack. The bus should not be moved until authorities have arrived.

Instructional Strategies

Discussion questions

- ✓ *How can drivers defuse a potential fight?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 5-4: "Violence, Fights, and Weapons"*

Workbook

- ✎ *5-4*

BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

Accurate documentation of serious behavior problems is very important.

Referrals. Used properly, written referrals are essential behavior management tools for children with special needs. But referrals are often misused. Guidelines for effective referral use include:

- Referrals should be used for serious problems. Referrals are legal documents that become part of the child's educational record and should not be filled out lightly.
- Most of the time, referrals should be used only after driver and aide have already tried to correct a child's misbehavior. (In severe incidents involving violence or outright defiance of a safety rule, children must be reported at once.)
- "Less is more" - school officials tend to take referrals more seriously when drivers use them selectively. Except in extreme cases, referrals should be limited to two or three children at a time.
- Accuracy is essential. Referrals should not be based on "hear-say." Inaccuracy undermines driver credibility.
- Legibility and neatness do matter. It should be clear to anyone reading the referral that the driver took it seriously.
- "Editorial comments" on referrals should be avoided. (e.g., "I don't know why we

have to transport Johnny anyway!")

- Behavior problems should be described in enough detail that administrators and parents really understand what happened.
- Drivers should always explain the safety reasons for a referral. Using the "S-word" ("safety") is effective in referrals. For example, "I warned Johnny to sit down, but he refused. It's unsafe. He will be hurt if the bus has to stop fast."
- Cursing and sexual language should be reported verbatim. Although distasteful, school administrators and parents need to know exactly what the child said.

Disciplinary consequences for children with special needs may be different than for nondisabled students - sometimes they won't be suspended from the bus at all. But drivers should not be discouraged from reporting serious behavior problems involving children with

UNIT 5.5 CORE CONTENT

The importance of documentation

disabilities. Documentation of bus problems helps educators evaluate the appropriateness of the child's IEP. Documentation also protects drivers and transportation departments. Liability could exist if serious behavior problems are not reported. When available, video cameras are extremely useful in documenting incidents on a bus.

Maintaining a log. Drivers and aides transporting challenging children should maintain a daily log. Behavior problems and incidents that weren't severe enough to trigger a referral should be noted in the log. Daily entries may reveal children's behavior patterns over time and can help special education teachers and administrators understand the context of a particular child's problems on the bus.



Instructional Strategies

Discussion questions

- ✓ *Why is documentation of behavior problems important when transporting challenging children?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 5-5: "The Importance of Documentation"*

Workbook

- ✎ 5-5

UNIT 5.6
CORE CONTENT
Unit 5 review

**BEST PRACTICE
BACKGROUND**

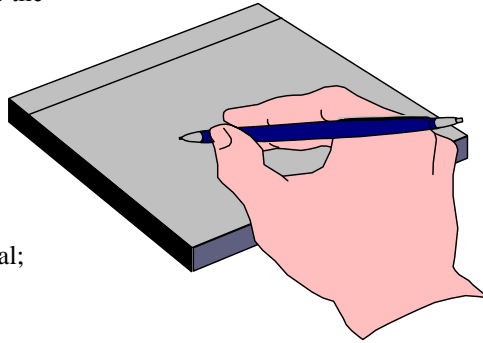
Behavior management is a complex and sometimes emotional topic for drivers. Make sure drivers don't leave the session with unanswered questions and concerns.

Review the main topics covered in the unit:

- What works with today's children;
- Avoiding a conflict spiral;
- Violence, fights, and weapons; and
- The importance of documentation.

Trainers should return to the unit's objectives to make sure drivers understood the main points.

Use the Review Questions to assess their learning.



Instructional Strategies

Review questions

- ✓ *Why is discipline for children with special needs determined on an individual basis?*
- ✓ *What are the key elements for successful behavior management?*
- ✓ *How can drivers help break a conflict spiral with a child who is emotionally disturbed?*
- ✓ *How can a driver defuse a potential fight and what should a driver do if a fight breaks out on the bus?*
- ✓ *To be most effective, how should referrals be used?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 5-6: "Unit 5 Review"*

Workbook

- ✎ 5.6